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An educational issue today concerns the quality of teaching in preschools. Many additional preschool teachers will be required in the next few years to meet the increased enrollments in preschool programs. Not only must proper training programs for future teachers be designed, but it has been noted that most people now teaching preschool children have not had proper training for the job. Personnel and training crises are currently relieved by: (1) federally funded institutes and fellowship programs, (2) the Regional Training Office for Head Start programs, (3) technical consultants who visit classrooms, and (4) itinerant trainers who are experienced preschool educators traveling through remote communities demonstrating techniques and skills. However, programs that provide inservice education unfortunately provide only minimal contact with classrooms. Evidence reveals that new teachers need help in their classrooms from trainers who can answer concrete "how to" questions. Emphasis should be transposed from inservice training to inservice helping. Colleges, universities, professional associations of preschool teachers, etc., should explore and refine inservice helping strategies. Expansion and strengthening of the Regional Training Office of Head Start would increase the inservice helping resources already available. (WD)

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HELP FOR TEACHERS IN PRESCHOOLS: A PROPOSAL

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HELP FOR TEACHERS IN PRESCHOOL: A PROPOSAL

One of the major issues in preschool education today is the quality of teaching. Today there are thousands of teachers in all kinds of preschool settings - teachers who are profoundly committed to the children in their classes - who have come to their tasks without training or experience in working with young children. They are teachers eager to use any ideas, suggestions, and guidance which will help them to provide children with a satisfying and stimulating preschool education.

The proposal presented here has emerged in the course of the work of summarizing and evaluating research on teaching in preschools being conducted at the ERIC Clearinghouse on Early Childhood Education at the University of Illinois. The proposal is based on what we have learned about staffing needs, trends in training, and current personnel practices in preschool education.

Assessment of Personnel Needs

A quick look at national trends in preschool education today leads inevitably to the conclusion that the need for new teachers to staff preschool programs of all types (day care centers, Head Start, other compensatory preschool programs) is rapidly approaching cataclysmic proportions.[1]

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1 Katz, L. G. and Weir, M. K. Staffing Preschools: Background Information. National Laboratory on Early Childhood Education, ERIC Clearinghouse on Early Childhood Education, University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois, 1969.

In 1966 there were 906,000 three-and four-year-olds enrolled in preschool classes throughout the country. In 1967 that number increased to 1,145,000. If the present growth rate continues, the number of three- and four-year-olds in preschools in 1972 will be close to 3,000,000. The same kind of dramatic increase in enrollment is occuring for five-year-olds.

There is no reliable way to estimate how many teachers the enrollment figures imply. One statement appearing in the literature indicates that within the next ten years, two and a half million new teachers will be needed.[1] Our own conservative estimate suggests that by 1970, 160,000 people who are not now preschool teachers will be called upon to staff the growing number of preschool classes.

Another fact which emerges from an examination of national trends is that most people who are now teaching preschool children have not had training for the job.[2] This is true of teachers in all types of preschool programs: day care centers (both public and private), Head Start classes, and a variety of other kinds of nursery schools.

There are many reasons why levels of training for preschool teaching are low. Some of these reasons are: (1) Only nineteen states have laws requiring certification for nursery school teachers, and even in those states, many types of preschool classes are not covered by the laws. (2)

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1 Southern Education Foundation. Early Childhood Education: a report of the Southern Regional Conference. Atlanta: SEF, 1967

2 op cit, pp. 3-5

Extensive training is unlikely to be pursued for jobs which offer the typical low pay of the majority of our preschools. (3) To some extent, the lack of training requirements for preschool teachers reflects the widespread notion that working with young children requires no special skills. (4) The rapid expansion in preschool education of the last few years could not wait for people to complete lengthly training courses.

Some trends in teacher training

There have been some noteworthy responses to the personnel and training crises arising out of the recent growth.

(1) The most common response has been the provision of federally funded institutes and fellowship programs. Most of these institutes have been directed to the re-training of people who are already certified and experienced teachers.[1, 2, 3]

(2) Another significant response has been the development of the Regional Training Office for Head Start programs.[4] These offices are distributed throughout seven geographic regions of the country in such a way that every local Head Start Child Development Center has a Regional Training Officer (RTO).

Most of the RTO's (about 70 in all) have academic appointments in departments of education, child development or home economics. The RTO is responsible for assisting local Head Start centers with professional orientation and training, and for supervision of the 40-hour and 8-week preservice and

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1 Klopf, G. and Bowman, G. W. Teacher Education in a Social Context. Mental Health Materials Center, Inc. New York, 1967

2 Spodek, B. (Ed.) Preparing Teachers for the Disadvantaged, NAEYC, 1966

3 See also Meier, J. and Brudnell, G. Report: Remote Training of Early Childhood Educators, Institute for Child Study. Colorado State College, Greeley, Colorado. 1968

4 Head Start Newsletter, 2, (10) Nov. 1967. Office of Economic Opportunity, Washington, D. C.

inservice training sessions for Head Start teachers. The RTO also provides experts in the component disciplines of Head Start programs (e.g., nutritionists, medical and social work specialists, psychologists, etc.), stimulates inservice professional growth, and facilitates the flow of information about materials, equipment, services, new knowledge and other resources to the local Head Start staff.

Discussions with twenty-one RTO's representing all seven regions revealed clearly the unique role of the RTO in upgrading the quality of teacher performance in Head Start classrooms. In most areas of the country, the RTO is the only person who has both long standing experience and training in early childhood education and who also reaches every Head Start worker at the local level.

(3) Another promising direction for preschools may be the "program assistant" procedure used in primary classes in the Tucson Early Education Model:

> The program assistant is a technical consultant who visits the classroom several hours each week. They are not supervisors in the usual sense, but communicate new techniques and ideas to the teacher, largely through demonstration with the on-going classroom activities. They assist in planning and help the teacher in the tasks of coordinating activities and obtaining needed materials. For optimal functioning, the ratio of program assistants to teachers should be about one to five in the initial stages of program implementation.[1]

(4) Another approach, called the "itinerant trainer," has come to our attention, although no written reports have been found. The "itinerant trainer," experienced and trained in preschool education, alighted in a small rural community in the remote regions of northern California. She spent several days in each Head Start center, bringing with her information and ideas, as well as "know-how." She assisted in on-the-spot problem solving, demonstrating techniques and skills in the classrooms, and then moved to the next small community for a few days.

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[1] The Tucson Early Education Model. National Laboratory on Early Childhood Education, ERIC Clearinghouse on Early Childhood Education, University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois, 1969

Implications of Current Trends

Several observations can be made from this overview:

(1) That most people who are now teaching in preschools of all types are not trained.

(2) That preschool programs can and will provide desperately needed opportunities for employment for many people who have been denied access to conventional professional training.

(3) That if preschool education is to fullfil its promise, teachers will need a wide variety of complex skills and a broad knowledge of child development and early childhood education. As former U. S. Commissioner of Education Harold Howe has pointed out, "it may well turn out that those dealing with the very young children require the most sophisticated training."[1]

(4) Finally, that new strategies for meeting teacher-training needs in preschool education must be explored.

Rubow presents a valuable and thorough review of the literature on inservice education (mainly for public school teachers).[2] Among her generalizations from the literature is the conclusion that "although teachers would prefer more contact with classroom settings, most of the inservice programs involve lectures and experiences outside the classroom setting." She reports that when teachers are asked to rate the value of different kinds of inservice programs, they significantly prefer those which occur within the classroom to those centered outside of it.

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1 Howe, Harold. Those Who Serve Education. U. S. Office of Education. Washington, D. C., 1969

2 Rubow, C. L. The Effectiveness of Three Training Methods for Teacher Aides Working in Pre-School Classrooms. Unpublished doctoral dissertation George Peabody College for Teachers, 1967

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In a similar way, Fuller's[1] review of research on "teachers' concerns" indicates that the training needs of new or inexperienced teachers are substantially different from those of teachers with more experience. Fuller proposes that teachers' needs can be seen as having "developmental stages" changing with increasing proximity to and practice in the actual classroom. Generalizing Fuller's conclusions to the preschool field implies that our present training efforts should be directed to helping teachers in their classrooms and that these efforts should be addressed to the concrete "how to" questions that really concern the new and inexperienced teachers typical of preschool classes today.

In an exploratory study of the problems of professionalization of preschool teachers by Ellen Handler at the University of Illinois the majority of the twenty-one teachers interviewed reported that field experience was the only part of their training of value, and that "content" courses in theory, history and philosophy of education was of little or no value to their needs on the job.[2]

In a recent discussion of teachers and their communities, Cuban[3] emphasized the importance of bringing the teacher-trainer to the schools

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1 Fuller, F. "Concerns of Teachers: A Developmental Conceptualization." Am. J. Ed. Res. 6 (2) 1969, 207-226

2 Handler, E. Problems of Professionalization of Preschool Teachers. Unpublished study. University of Illinois

3 Cuban, L. "Teacher and Community" Harvard Ed Rev, 39, (2) 1969 pp 258-259

rather than the conventional practice of taking college students on "field trips" to the classrooms. He states that the "classroom and community must be the crucible of training where...knowledge, skill, and self-awareness have an opportunity to be applied, modified, and further created."

A Proposal

When we take into account the present needs--in terms of sheer numbers alone--and add some of the research findings on the developmental needs of teachers themselves, we seem to require not so much "inservice training" as inservice helping. The model represented by the RTO of Head Start, or the "program assistant" of Tucson, or the "itinerant trainer" of California, all provide useful examples of inservice helping.

The inservice helping approach being proposed here seems to require the following characteristics:

a) It must occur largely in the teacher's classroom. To be helpful, the trainer or helper must see the real-life physical and interpersonal conditions in which the teacher is working.

b) It must emphasize the practical "how to" needs of new and inexperienced teachers. Theory, knowledge, history, philosophy, etc., must follow upon the expressed interests of the trainees.

c) It must be based on a relationship characterized by mutual trust between teacher and trainer. The customary "supervisor" or "inspector" roles developed in many public school districts do not seem to give teachers the support and encouragement they seek.

d) It must encourage the trainee to see herself as experimenter, innovator, learner and problem-solver and to see these qualities as inherent in the role of the teacher of young children.

e) It should lead to professionalism, using the term 'professional' to denote commitment to high standards of performance and continuous efforts to grow in competence, to develop new skills and to acquire deeper and broader knowledge of the nature of development and learning.

We are proposing here that agencies such as junior colleges, state colleges, universities, adult education authorities, day care agencies, professional associations of preschool teachers, consultant firms, etc., explore and refine "inservice helping" strategies. Furthermore, expansion and strengthening of the Regional Training Offices of Head Start would increase the "inservice helping" resources already available.

We are confronted with a personnel crisis in preschools at just that point in time when the custodial approach to early education has been replaced by great faith in the power of preschool programs to alter significantly the intellectual, physical, and social life-chances of the children for whom they have been designed.

No matter how we would wish to construe the "ideal" and the "ought," the quality of teacher performance in the majority of our preschool settings today is such that it potentially threatens the very goals which have stimulated its recent expansion. Modern goals for preschool education require of our teachers a wide variety of skills and competencies. Teachers of young children must be nurtured, encouraged, trained, assisted and

stimulated to the best of all our abilities. We must take our training, preferably "helping," out to the teachers, into their classrooms where the action really is. Traditional reliance on college-based degree programs to meet preschool teacher-training needs seems unrealistic for the present and near future.